



COUNCIL MINUTES

December 1, 2008

The City Council of the City of Mesa met in a Study Session in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on December 1, 2008 at 4:06 p.m.

COUNCIL PRESENT

Mayor Scott Smith
Alex Finter
Dina Higgins
Kyle Jones
Dennis Kavanaugh
Dave Richins
Scott Somers

COUNCIL ABSENT

None

OFFICERS PRESENT

Christopher Brady
Debbie Spinner
Linda Crocker

1. Review items on the agenda for the December 1, 2008 Regular Council meeting.

All of the items on the agenda were reviewed among Council and staff and the following was noted:

Conflicts of interest declared: None

Items added to the consent agenda: None

Items removed from the agenda: None

2. Hear a presentation, discuss and provide direction on FY 08/09 and 09/10 budget issues including, but not limited to:

a. Development and Sustainability Department (Building Safety, Planning, Environmental Programs, Code Compliance and Water Conservation).

b. Development and Sustainability Department (Building Safety, Planning, Environmental Programs, Code Compliance and Water Conservation).

Mayor Smith advised that major departments would make presentations to the Council at future Study Sessions regarding their objectives and proposed service models.

City Manager Christopher Brady stated that the current economic environment has accelerated an ongoing staff evaluation of services and the manner in which the City can provide services

with limited resources. He said that the proposed improvements and restructuring provide an opportunity to consolidate and improve processes based on the existence of a different model of the employment base. Mr. Brady explained that the City intends to be cautious about creating specialized positions that may not be required for core services. He added that governments must be flexible in order to be able to adapt to dynamic and changing economic conditions. Mr. Brady advised that the City would attempt to reengineer a structure that provides the core services along with the ability to bring in individuals with specialized skills when their services are required.

- a. Development and Sustainability Department (Building Safety, Planning, Environmental Programs, Code Compliance and Water Conservation).

Development Services Director Christine Zielonka displayed a PowerPoint presentation (a copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) to provide an overview of the proposed "Development and Sustainability Department," and she said that the primary focus of the proposal is to improve the process and to meet the needs of the development community. She added that the effort is designed to improve the efficiency of existing staff and to plan, develop and promote sustainable communities with a focus on customer satisfaction.

Mayor Smith noted that although some citizens may equate this proposal to social engineering, the community has a vested interest in creating and maintaining sustainable neighborhoods. He added that the Mesa Proving Grounds area would be developed in a manner that is sustainable.

Ms. Zielonka said that the "Development and Sustainability Department" would provide opportunities for process improvements, provide capacity for future growth, and consolidate operations for maximum efficiency. She noted the challenge of properly sizing the department for the current workload during these economic conditions while being prepared for future demands. Ms. Zielonka cited the following examples of recent successes:

- The West Main Street Sub-Area Plan with Transit-Oriented Development.
- The Mesa Proving Grounds with the DMB Planned Community District.
- The conversion of Banner Mesa Hospital to the Banner Mesa Office Center.

Ms. Zielonka noted that the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) approach along West Main Street is part of a Sub-Area Plan, which required extensive collaboration with citizens, and a review of the existing infrastructure in order to accommodate a higher density in the future. She noted that the Mesa Proving Grounds required coordination with many departments to create a development that was not typical of the normal standards and that addressed long-term sustainability. Ms. Zielonka emphasized that the goal is to have an organizational structure in place that can quickly respond and adapt to market-driven conditions.

In response to a question from Mayor Smith, Planning Director John Wesley confirmed that the DMB project would be reviewed by the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Board and by staff for approval. He added that an analysis is continuing to determine the feasibility of consolidating additional staff functions.

City Manager Christopher Brady stated that integrating design elements and standards in the initial stages establishes the qualitative component and enables a more efficient process as well as a level of quality control.

Ms. Zielonka cited DMB as an example and stated that because the overall design elements and standards were approved by P&Z and the Council, specific projects within the development can be addressed more efficiently and in a streamlined manner.

Mayor Smith said that as a result of having well-defined standards at the beginning of the process, applicants will have a good understanding of the development and the design elements that are required.

Ms. Zielonka, referring to the Banner Mesa Hospital conversion, advised that staff met with the owner early in the process to ascertain their needs and the constraints related to the project. She said that as a result of that meeting, staff determined that the City should be more flexible with regard to parking, landscaping, and road improvement requirements. Ms. Zielonka reported that a major time saver has been the "Permit by Inspection" Program, in which the inspector reviews the work as it is being done. She added that staff provided assistance to the developer's design team with regard to the City's Building Codes.

Responding to questions from Councilmember Somers, Ms. Zielonka noted that although "Permit by Inspection" would not normally be utilized on a large project such as the hospital conversion, staff tested the concept on this project and found the process to be very successful. She added that the "Permit by Inspection" Program would be expanded in the future to include other large projects.

Ms. Zielonka summarized that the new Development and Sustainability Department would include the following:

- Planning Services
- Development Planning (will work hand in hand with Planning Services)
- Construction Plan Review and Permitting (considering a consolidated Plan Review)

In response to a question from Councilmember Somers, Ms. Zielonka said that training is an important factor. She stated that staff will be encouraged to obtain the necessary certifications, and she noted that cross-training would be a challenge during the next few weeks. Ms. Zielonka added that this also presents an opportunity for outsourcing in order to obtain the needed expertise.

Mr. Brady stated that the economic decline presented the opportunity to retool employees by implementing cross-training and encouraging employees to obtain additional certifications.

Mayor Smith expressed the hope that the City would be able to maintain a high level of customer service when certain activities are outsourced.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that outsourcing could involve retaining an expert to work with staff; that the plans could be sent out to a private firm with the required expertise; that customer satisfaction would remain a high priority; that DMB will be funding a "project manager" position to oversee the approval process; that the funding option is also available to other developers; and that the City would audit the data presented by an outside firm.

Mayor Smith suggested that the City should be more accepting of plans that have been certified by a professional engineer.

Ms. Zielonka advised that at the next meeting of the Development Advisory Forum, staff is planning to propose the formation of a subgroup to address the issue of accepting plans certified by a professional engineer.

- Consolidated Inspections and Enforcement

Ms. Zielonka advised that the Development and Sustainability Department would be responsible for Code Compliance. She noted that a Building Inspector in a certain geographic area can address both building and code compliance inspections.

Mr. Brady responded to a question from Mayor Smith by explaining that the City is better positioned to respond to an increase in building activity by retaining the expertise of the Building Inspectors.

Councilmember Kavanaugh noted that Code Compliance Officers have established positive relationships with the Police Department, Neighborhood Services and the City Council Assistants, and he stated that these officers have become an important communications link between the Council and residents.

Vice Mayor Jones added that Code Compliance Officers have also established effective relationships with neighborhood leaders.

Mr. Brady reported that six Code Compliance Officers have been retained in areas where concentrated needs exist, and he noted that Building Inspectors have brought an expertise to certain problems that Code Compliance Officers are not qualified to handle. He advised that Building Inspectors would also participate as members of the Action Teams.

Councilmember Somers noted that during the past few years, responsibility for the Code Compliance function moved from the Police Department to Neighborhood Services and now to Development and Sustainability. He asked what the impact would be with regard to the implementation of the new "slum landlord" law recently approved by the voters.

Mr. Brady said that Building Inspectors have the experience and certification to address the "slum landlord" law, which involves inspecting building interiors with regard to health and safety violations of the Building Code. He noted that Code Compliance Officers are limited to inspecting the area outside of the building.

Ms. Zielonka referred to the City Court building currently under construction, and she noted that one Building Inspector could address building, zoning, air quality, storm water and Code Compliance issues. She said that the Desert Uplands is another area where a consolidated approach to inspections would be valuable.

- Sustainability and Environmental Programs

Ms. Zielonka outlined the goals related to sustainability, and she noted that conservation is being encouraged and that sustainability would be addressed early in the development process.

She said that “best practices” would be promoted in new development, and she cited the DMB project as an example of “21st Century Desert Urbanism.” Ms. Zielonka added that redevelopment offers opportunities for sustainability in “brownfield” areas and infrastructure, Zoning Code flexibility and by connecting transportation and land use issues. She stated that Mesa intends to be a leader in the Region regarding sustainability, and she advised that Deputy Director for Environmental and Sustainability Programs Scott Bouchie is participating in a group that is studying the manner in which municipal governments can encourage sustainability.

Mr. Brady noted that shifting responsibility for the sustainability function from the Utilities area to the Development and Sustainability Department encourages sustainable practices early in the design phase of a development.

Ms. Zielonka stated that a major challenge facing the City is being able to respond to current economic conditions while planning for future growth. She said that temporary agencies would be utilized for out-sourcing needs to meet future demand.

Mayor Smith noted that the changes in the service model have budget ramifications.

In response to a question from Councilmember Higgins, Ms. Zielonka advised that in the short term, emphasis would be placed on implementing the existing sub-area plans rather than developing new plans.

Mr. Brady stated that sub-area plans are typically budgeted separately. He added that if a need for a sub-area plan is identified, there would be a Council discussion regarding the allocation of funds for the process.

Mayor Smith noted that sub-area plans create a framework and an environment that encourages the type of development that supports the long-term plan to create a sustainable community.

Mayor Smith thanked staff for the presentation.

b. Transportation, including transit.

Discussion of this agenda item was postponed to a future Study Session.

3. Acknowledge receipt of minutes of various boards and committees.

- a. Board of Adjustment meeting held on October 14, 2008
- b. Library Advisory Board meeting held on September 16, 2008

It was moved by Councilmember Somers, seconded by Vice Mayor Jones, that receipt of the above-referenced minutes be acknowledged.

Carried unanimously.

4. Hear reports on meetings and/or conferences attended.

There were no reports on meetings and/or conferences attended.

5. Scheduling of meetings and general information.

Mayor Smith addressed two individuals who had completed speaker cards and advised that the Council does not usually accept requests to speak at Monday evening Study Sessions unless the individuals are prescheduled (The two individuals who completed speaker cards indicated that they would communicate their concerns to the Council via email.)

City Manager Christopher Brady stated that the meeting schedule is as follows:

Thursday, December 4, 2008, 7:30 a.m. – Study Session

Councilmember Higgins announced that a District 5 Pancake Breakfast would be held on Saturday, December 6, at Fire Station 214.

6. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Study Session adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

SCOTT SMITH, MAYOR

ATTEST:

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Study Session of the City Council of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 1st day of December 2008. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK

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